

Board of Trustees of the Cambridge Public Library
IDENTIFYING ACTION PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR
Notes from the 10/21/02 Planning Meeting
facilitated by Steven Miller

CONTEXT: Trustees were asked to individually write down (a) the three most important issues that they the Library was facing in the immediate future; (b) the two things that they felt were most important for the Board of Trustees to do in order for the Library to meet its current challenges; (c) one personal “pet peeve” they had about any aspect of their relationship the Library as a user, Trustee, or Cambridge citizen.

We then went around the table with each of the eight people participating giving one item from their lists, starting with the pet peeves, and continuing to go around until each category was fully covered, keeping track of the number of times similar issues were raised. In the process, it became very clear that most of the Trustees agreed on the central challenges and tasks before them. These notes, written by Steven Miller, summarize the conclusions reached through the Planning Meeting’s discussion.

PRIORITY ISSUES & CHALLENGES FACING THE LIBRARY

- *Keeping the Design/Construction Process On Track*

Nearly everyone included some version of this issue in their list. It was expressed in various ways, several of which included “keeping the public informed and supportive of the vision.” During discussion, it was generally agreed that this issue needs to be immediately addressed.

- *Create Plans for Continued Operation & Visibility During Construction Disruptions*

Again, this was on almost everyone’s list, with different people raising different aspects of the issue: the need to find a good temporary location(s), the need to pre-adjust staffing, the need to keep the programs serving young people strong and visible, the need to rethink budget allocations, the need for special signage, etc. During discussion, it was generally agreed that this issue should take center stage later in the year, and the process should start with discussions within the affected staff about their space needs. The Trustees would then carry the message to city government.

- *Prepare for Higher/Different Operating Costs During Construction & Beyond*

The third most frequently mentioned issue was the need to begin finding ways to pay for keeping programs at full steam and staff at full strength during the construction period and then for (hopefully) expanded programming in the new building. During discussion, it was generally agreed that for now this issue is best addressed by building public support for the new construction. Eventually, ways will need to be found to allow people to buy “monuments” or “programs” with the biggest opportunity coming around the time of the new building’s groundbreaking. In the meantime, Trustees and Susan need to begin talking with the Friends leadership about the idea of funding a fundraiser for a capital campaign.

Other Issues Listed at Least Once

- Implementing the new integrated Library IT system.
- Moving forward with the Galbraith Lecture series idea.
- Keeping the staff motivated and informed to act as “good ambassadors” to the public.

PRIORITY TASKS THAT TRUSTEES SHOULD TAKE ON

- *Increase “Ambassadorial” Activity; Do More Public Outreach & PR*

This was everyone’s top choice – sometimes their top two choices. The second part of the Planning Meeting was spent brainstorming ways to begin acting on this priority (see below).

Other Tasks Listed at Least Once

- Become more active in fundraising and exploring grant opportunities (a distant second)
- Schedule more Planning Meetings
- Set up Subcommittees for specific tasks so more gets done between Trustee meetings
(This was done in the second part of the meeting: see below)
- Do things that brings the community into the library more
- Become better known to the staff
- Focus meeting discussion time on top priorities

PET PEEVES

It was decided that at every future meeting, ten minutes would be set aside to deal with one of the following items. The goal would be to brainstorm possible solutions as well as what the Trustees could do to help implement whichever solution the staff (via Susan) ends up deciding was best.

- Making the front entrance less dark and dreary.
- Better signage everywhere.
- Making it possible for readers to use the web to renew books gotten via inter-library loans.
- Improving public access to the Cambridge collection.
- Improve the interface of the electronic card catalog (if not bring back the physical one as well)
- Make it easier to travel from one branch to another.
- Make the interior (of the main branch?) feel less crowded and ugly.
- Get the staff to pay more attention to information given to them by the Library Administrators

ACTION ITEMS

“The best politics is good service.”

Trustees felt that it was vital that they – like the staff -- do more to give the library a “human face.” A number of action items were agreed upon.

- *Collect or create materials for outreach effort*
 - (1) Ask the architects to create a simple slide show celebrating the Libraries current programs, indicating the problems the current space creates for community service, going over some of the extensive steps that were taken to encourage

- community input (from the Library 2000 effort onward), describing current design plans for the new building, and giving a hint of the kinds of program improvements that the new space will make possible. The cost of this, and other things being requested from the architects, should be covered by the outreach part of the contract.
- (2) Make a few copies of the existing short videotape about the library.
 - (3) Create a basic “script” that people could use with the slide show and/or the videotape, providing plenty of opportunity for audience questions & comments about their own hopes for the future.
 - (4) Get copies of some of the high quality architectural renderings & drawings
 - (5) Create or collect copies of brochures for each of the branches so that any time an event was held in a neighborhood the presenter could distribute brochures about the nearest branch.
 - (6) Work with the Producers Cooperative at CCTV to videotape one of the neighborhood presentations and edit the tape into versions of various lengths.

- *Over the next 9 months, each Trustee will get at least three organizations they are members of or know people in to sponsor a Library presentation.*

The presenter does NOT have to be the person who arranged for the invitation – although that would be great if it happened.

- *Susan (and Janet? And other Trustees?) will talk with the Friends and ask them to commit to hosting at least 9 informal “Coffee/Tea With Library Friends” for their neighbors in various parts of the city. One or more of the Trustees, with or without Susan, will sign up for each of these events.*

We did not set a numerical target at the Planning Meeting, so the “9” could be changed. But it is important to set a target and challenge the Friends to meet it. At each of these informal gatherings one or two of the Trustees, with or without Susan, would come and talk about the Library’s programs, the opportunities and challenges involved in the design and construction of the new building, and the need to enlarge our collective vision of what the library can do in the future. The key here is going back to the new Five Year Strategic Plan to pull out the vision statements: the presenter is ultimately promoting the Trustee’s vision of what the Library can contribute to a democratic society.

- *NOTE: Between the two preceding Actions, each Trustee would be expected to do at least ____ presentations over the coming year.*

At the Planning Meeting, the Trustees did not set a numerical expectation for themselves, but it will be important to do so in order that people feel comfortable with the level of commitment and its equal distribution. The overall goal is to have 3 or 4 events each month with the burden of doing the presenting spread as widely as possible.

- *A monthly article will be written for the Chronicle discussing some program the library offers and describing how the coming new building will create opportunities for even better/more public benefits.*

The Planning Meeting did not discuss who would do this. Therefore, at their next meeting Trustees should each commit to a topic and a month. Susan or another staff person can serve as an intensive editor, so no one should be afraid of creating a first draft.

- *Create a slide and use it as an “Ad” at one or more local theaters and perhaps on CCTV.*

Susan will work with her staff or the architects to create the slide(s). The Friends will be asked to cover the cost of having it shown at the theater(s).

- *Create small brochure or one-pager or post-card to be inserted into city mailings and/or sent using the Post Office’s “free delivery to everyone if unaddressed” service for nonprofits and/or government agencies (assuming it still exists).*

Some research and negotiation needs to be done and a series of different materials need to be created. [We did not specify exactly who will do this or where the funds to cover the cost will come from.]

- *Edit the videotape and/or slide show for showing on CCTV and at community meetings or in the library.*

This will require help from volunteers, perhaps from the CCTV or a high school class. This will, however, take a long time to finalize and finish.